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EVIDENCES OF RACE DEGENERATION IN THE UNITED STATES

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Prophecies of degeneration to come are as plenty as blackberries and have been since the foundation of the republic. But data that would meet the approbation of a Missourian are as abundantly scarce. The unanimous opinion of all foreign and most native observers is that the American race is degenerating, becoming lank, nervous, dyspeptic, frivolous and immoral; their only disagreement being the degree of said degeneracy and the causes which have produced it. The most favorite causes are: Too much rich foods, bolting our meals, fried things, wasting our saliva on the sidewalks instead of saving it for digestion, liberty run to license, too much irreverence and impiety. The general feeling fifty years ago was summed up in the remark of one of Martin Chuzzlewit's contemporaries, that "everything degenerates in America. The lion becomes a puma, the eagle a fish hawk, and man a Yankee."

In spite of our alleged "gude conceit worsels," we have been ready to almost apologetically admit that we were dyspeptic, neurasthenic, catarrhal, with the worst teeth and complexions in the world. In spite of our abounding ill health, each individual generation managed to jog along after a sort, but it was bound to tell in the long run, and now after from three to five generations, the awful and inevitable results have come. The first line-up which stamped us with the brand of physical inferiority was in the days of the Civil War, and here in the enlistment the full measure of our physical degeneracy was realized.

Almost every country in Europe and every degree of Americanization from the German "forty-niner" to the descendants of the three brothers who came over in the "Mayflower" was represented; not merely in scores, but in hundreds and thousands. When the war was over, some rash person started in to make a comparative study of these measurements, with the mortifying result of finding that the race had become so abnormally elongated in this process of

decay that the native-born Americans of all sorts were an inch to an inch and one-half longer than the foreign-born soldiers; and that those recruits who had been longest in America and at the same time least mixed with any recent importations or streams of immigrant Kentuckians and West Virginians were nearly two inches taller than the soldiers of any European nationality. This, of course, was simply due to the proverbial lankness of the Yankee. We turned to the next item, of chest measurement, in fear and trembling, only to find, however, that, due probably to our well-known fondness for oratory, our lungs had actually expanded to a circumference of an inch and one-half greater than that of the average European-born recruits. Wind, however, would explain all that, and we turned to the scales to find that our national lankness had consisted so largely of bone or some other heavy substance that our average was between five and ten pounds heavier than that of any foreign-born nationality. And again, the chestiest, as well as the longest recruits came from the mountains and valleys of Kentucky and Virginia.

This was most disconcerting, but of course we have known since the day of old Tommy Green that mere size did not constitute greatness, or even vigor, so as soon as proper statistics reporting births, deaths and other vital statistics were established, we began tremblingly to compare the records of Massachusetts, New York and the Carolinas with those of England, Germany and France. Nearly every comparison had a provoking trick, of almost an identical or even lower death rate and disease rate in the American column, except for our great cities; but of recent years even these have ranged up alongside of the European figures. This, of course, was easily explained by the imperfectness of our records and the fact that many cases of death and disease were not recorded. But for the last twenty-five years our sanitary organizations have advanced by leaps and bounds, until now we have large areas which are almost as perfectly reported and recorded as any in Europe, and the figures for which may be relied upon for purposes of comparison, and the net result may be summed up by saying that at practically no age, class or social condition is the death rate in the United States more than one or two points per thousand higher than in the corresponding class in any of the European countries, and in the large majority of them, especially in infancy and childhood, it is markedly lower.

One thing, however, we were absolutely sure of, and that was that we were not here in America living as they did in the good old days on the other side of the Atlantic. We might be bigger and healthier than our ancestors and contemporaries in Europe, but we certainly die earlier, probably by going to pieces all at once, like the "one hoss shay." The first thing that reassured us was that our insurance companies were still doing business, not only at the same stand, but at the same rates as European countries, and they did not appear to be losing money, either. Of course, this might be accounted for by the national pride and well-known philanthropy of these great benevolent institutions. But a study both of their records and of the mortality lists showed the unexpected fact that the average duration of life in America, even thirty years ago, was from three to five years greater than that in any European country, while to-day it is something like six years to the good. Yet our companies are still unselfishly doing business at the old rates.

Evidently our racial degeneracy is of a strange and peculiar type that cannot be precisely expressed in figures and measurements. It has not overtaken us as yet, but it will soon enough. Physically, we may be keeping up a deceitful appearance of vigor, but mentally and morally our doom is sealed. Yet here again the figures mock us and baffle us! Upon the face of the records we have less insanity per thousand of our population than any European country. This might, of course, be explained on the classic grounds suggested in Polonius' advice to send Hamlet to England, since there his eccentricities would not be noted, for over there all the men are as mad as he. But when we find on further scrutiny that our foreign-born nations contribute always an equal, and in most cases a distinctly larger, percentage of their numbers to our insane asylums than any locality or class of our native born, it would appear that the standards of eccentricity are not so very different on the two sides of the Atlantic.

But what will it avail us to be physically sound and mentally sane if we are morally corrupt? Upon this point all our critics, friendly or unfriendly, chant an alleluiah chorus in absolute unison. American lawlessness, American disrespect for authority, the corruption of our politics, the looseness of our marriage ties—all are matters of world-wide notoriety, but somehow they do not seem to get into the police records, for our average of criminality even

in the best policed and reported districts is seldom higher than that of any corresponding European district and in certain trivial eccentricities, such as wife beating, ill treating children, drunkenness, etc., far below that of any European community of corresponding class. Of course, we have less than one-tenth of the number of paupers and dependents, but that is no fault of ours. Our virgin soil and our fierce determination to be rich at all hazards have automatically protected us against this defect without any special intention on our part.

However, even if the nemesis of physical degeneracy have not overtaken this generation, we are all agreed that it will the next. Everybody knows that the American child is spindle-shanked, pasty-faced and a bundle of nerves, because he eats too much candy and sweets, sits up till all hours, and gets no family discipline to speak of. There is where Nature is going to catch us!

Some years ago a fool physician who "rushed in where angels fear to tread" had the "nerve" to begin weighing, testing chest expansion and measuring room after room of American school children and classifying them according to their nationality, their parentage and descent. We have now some scores of thousands of such measurements, and they show that the native-born American child certainly has spindled to the extent of growing from three-fourths of an inch to one and one-half inches taller than the school children of the same or corresponding social class in most European countries. He has also, by his habit of living largely upon candy and chewing gum, got ahead of little John, Max and Jean by from three to twelve pounds at all ages, and his notorious oratorical powers have extended his chest to a superior degree of expansion. Any doubt as to the same peculiarity in our American yardsticks and scales was dissipated by the further comparison which showed an almost equal superiority of all children born in America over those of any nationality of foreign birth with the partial exception of the Norwegian and certain German children. A step further showed that the second generation American school children, that is, those born of American-born parents were again above the average in both height, weight and chest measurement of all American born, and that those which were three generations or more in America had a still higher average.

More interesting yet, the great scholarship and mental develop-

ment of all these classes of children followed an almost absolute parallel course with their size and weight. Apparently we need not worry about race degeneration among the children. We had better be considering what is going to happen to us when they grow up and come into competition with us. In the words of Patrick Henry: "If this be American race degeneracy, let us make the best of it!"